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News Release

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Contact: Jason Kelly WSDA, (360) 902-1815
Larry Altose, Ecology (206) 920-2600
Suzanne Pate, Snohomish Health District (425) 339-8704
Ron Nichols, USDA NRCS (509) 323-2900
Margaret Ainscough, WDFW (360) 902-2408

WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
P.O. Box 42560, Olympia, Washington 98504-2560
Visit our Web site at: agr.wa.gov

French Slough dissolved oxygen levels continue to improve

OLYMPIA – A key measure of water quality, the level of dissolved oxygen, continues to improve in French Slough in the wake of a large manure spill in adjoining fields. Fish need dissolved oxygen in water in order to breathe through their gills.

On Monday, water samples taken at the pump station where the slough enters the Snohomish River indicated 3.8 milligrams of oxygen per liter of water (mg/L), rising to 4.8 mg/L on Tuesday and 5.8 mg/L on Wednesday. Upstream of the spill site in French Slough, dissolved oxygen has remained steady around 7 mg/L.

Oxygen levels in the Snohomish River were measured at 8.6 mg/L on Monday, which is considered healthy for fish populations.

Water quality in the slough was dramatically impacted after a 21 million gallon manure lagoon failed late Sunday or early Monday, releasing an unknown quantity of untreated waste across farm fields and into the waterway. French Slough empties into the Snohomish River approximately 1.5 miles downstream from the spill site.

No fish kills have been observed in the slough or the river. Juvenile salmon and steelhead trout may be present this time of year.

Ecology, WSDA and the City of Snohomish are waiting for test results for the level of disease-causing bacteria in both the slough and the river. Those results will be released when they are available.

Snohomish Health District has received no reports of human illness related to the spill and no public drinking water sources are at risk from the spill.

Public health officials remind residents that untreated surface water should never be swallowed because it can carry disease-causing organisms. Contact with untreated water should be followed by thorough hand washing.

Teams from Ecology and USDA's Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) continue their efforts to determine the cause of the embankment collapse. Ecology and NRCS inspectors gathered information at the site earlier this week.

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Next week, an NRCS engineering investigation committee, consisting of a geo-technical engineer from the NRCS National Design Center; a civil engineer from the West National Technical Support Center; a geologist from the Washington NRCS State Office; and an area Agricultural Engineer will conduct further on-scene investigations.

Ecology's Dam Safety Office will also be conducting its own independent investigation into the failure.

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